

Lebanese Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation:

Lebanon generally upheld and preserved respect for human rights and the rule of law, and the freedoms of expression and of assembly were generally observed. However, justice and security institutions faced renewed challenges, threatening the delivery of basic justice services. No substantial progress was recorded in the fight against corruption and in ensuring the independence of the judiciary. The investigation into the 4 August 2020 Beirut port explosion continued to be stalled. Persistent institutional fragility delayed meaningful reforms, thereby impacting social and economic rights, notably for marginalised communities - including children, elderly, women, disabled individuals, refugees and migrant workers.

Throughout 2023, Lebanon bore the consequences of the failure to elect a President and to appoint a fully-fledged Government. Municipal elections were again postponed. No significant progress was recorded in the implementation of electoral reforms following the parliamentary elections of May 2022, including increasing the political representation of women and accessibility for vulnerable categories.

Alleviating discrimination under the various sectarian personal status laws remained a challenge while the observed occurrence of sexual and gender-based violence continued. Discrimination and aggressions against the LGBTI community increased, and a legislative initiative to decriminalise homosexuality failed. The adopted Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has yet to be ratified. In 2022, the Lebanese Parliament adopted a law authorizing the Government to proceed with the ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocol. The following step would be for Lebanon to revise its laws in accordance with the Convention.

Restrictions of movement restrictions and curfews were imposed on Syrian refugees by various municipalities and security forces across Lebanon. The year 2023 saw an increase in deportations to Syria. Security conditions in some of the Palestinian refugee camps continued to deteriorate. Labour migrants predominantly engaged in domestic work remained subject to a sponsorship system ("Kafala"), rendering them vulnerable to exploitation.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to embed a human rights-based approach in programming and development, through a number of targeted projects and by raising human rights concerns in official meetings. The EU notably focused its cooperation engagement in the field of justice reform, community policing, anti-corruption, media law reform, electoral support (women's electoral participation and representation), children's rights to education, LGBTI community's rights, rights of refugees and migrant domestic workers. These priority areas were integrated into an active public diplomacy of the EU Delegation to Lebanon, marking various human rights milestones and occasions on social and traditional media, and commenting on human rights violations or emerging topics.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In the very challenging institutional, economic and regional context faced by Lebanon throughout the year 2023, the EU bilateral political engagement on human rights notably focused on the need for institutional accountability and legitimacy, the independence of the judiciary, governance reforms, freedom of expression and media freedom and the fight against corruption.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU consolidated its dialogue with the Ministry of Justice, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the main judicial bodies and civil society on justice sector reform, through enhanced dialogue with authorities and coordination with international donors and

a dedicated EU-funded project. The EU also supported community policing, notably through a rights-based collection and use of digital evidence. The EU continued to support the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy and active grassroots organisations in this field. In addition, in order to strengthen accountability and promote transparency, the EU provided support to oversight bodies and to the National Anti-corruption commission.

The EU continuously advocated freedom of expression, assembly and media through public outreach events, notably the Samir Kassir Award for freedom of the press. The EU funded a project on media law reform, legal standards and media governance during elections. The EU supported a project for key election management bodies to organise high-quality elections and coordinate CSOs' advocacy, communication, democratic participation, accessibility, youth engagement, women's representation, and media monitoring. The EU notably advocated a gender quota in the electoral law and gender mainstreaming.

The EU supported children's right to education, focusing on access to free public education for the most vulnerable children, contributing to the functioning of public schools, quality teaching and learning, inclusive education for children with learning difficulties and disabilities and alternative forms of learning for children who dropped out. The EU supported the rollout of the Child Protection Policy and the National Action Plan on Prevention and Response to Child Marriage.

The EU continued to support programmes to improve the living conditions of refugees and host communities, including in education, health, social protection and assistance, as well as water, hygiene and sanitation.

The EU supported a project to address forced labour and exploitation for migrant domestic workers.

5. Multilateral context: The EU consistently underscored the imperative to deliver justice in Lebanon, as exemplified by its statement under item 2 in the UN Human Rights Council stressing the need for a transparent investigation into the Beirut port explosion.

The EU carried out diplomatic *démarches* and made public statements in support of human rights in a multilateral context, including on the occasion of the 67th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the 78th session of the UNGA Third Committee or Lebanon's participation at the World Congress against Death Penalty in November in Berlin.

The EU recalled the importance for Lebanon to fulfil its reporting obligations under the Human Rights treaty system in due time - including the report for the mid-term review of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review and the reports due under the Convention against Torture, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.